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National League

2. POLITICAL

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The National League

a. Background

While Josef Heger's National Democratic Union (NDU) has folded and its leader adopted another line, the National League (Nationalsozialistische Liga) - second of the two eastern-oriented groups appealing to ex-Nazis organized just a year ago - continues to exist, if not to prosper. During the course of the spring, both of these organizations caused Austrian authorities some apprehension; in their speeches on May Day of this year Chancellor Figl and State Secretary Graf sharply attacked them (see Intelligence Bulletin No. 1139). Today, however, only little significance is attached to the League. Austrian police officials point to its rejection not only by Austrians in general but by all but a very small minority of the ex-Nazis as well. According to an inside source, the League in mid-September had approximately 500 actual members and perhaps two to three thousand supporters not holding actual membership; at present high police officials estimate the League's strength - members and supporters - at a maximum of four to five thousand. These are concentrated largely in Vienna, though League activity has by now reported in all Austrian provinces with the exception of Burgenland and Vorarlberg.

The basic ideas which led to the founding of the National League were originally propagated in the Federal Penitentiary at Stein, Lower Austria, by Dr. Herbert Tave, a former leading Nazi and member of the National Committee during the Schuschnigg regime. Tave maintained that a nationalist movement in Austria, to be successful, must align itself with the Soviet Union. Soviet policy does not propagate internationalism, but a kind of national imperialism according to Tave; in the SED in Germany the former German Nationalists, who otherwise would be condemned to unimportance, are being given a chance to work actively under Communist leadership, in most cases retaining their former positions. Dr. Adolf Slavik, founder and leading spirit of the League, was converted to Tave's way of thinking during an eleven month period of 1948-1949 when Slavik and Tave shared a cell at Stein.

Slavik was born on 24 March 1918 in Vienna, received his doctorate in jurisprudence from the University of Vienna in 1940. During his university days he was a member of the strongly monarchist student organization "Ottonia"; it is alleged that because of disappointment at his failure to achieve a position of significance in this group he turned against it and became an informant of the Hitler Youth (HJ) on activities in monarchist circles. On 24 March 1936 he joined the NSDAP, receiving Party No. 6,243,960. After the Anschluss in 1938 the Nazis rewarded him with the Memorial Medal and the Gold Honor Badge of the Hitler Youth (HJ). In May 1938 he voluntarily joined the SS where he received basic military training, on the completion of which he was appointed Inspector of the HJ patrol service (Streifendienst) in Vienna. At the outbreak of the war he joined the SS regiment "Der Fuehrer," and from 1940 to 1942 he was attached to the SS Police Court for Wehrkreis XVII in Vienna. In 1942 he was expelled from the HJ because of his attacks on the HJ Leader for Vienna. During the remainder of the war he apparently saw service with various SS units, ultimately attaining the rank of Obersturmfuehrer (senior lieutenant). At war's end he was taken POW by the US Forces, released in September 1945. After the war, Slavik joined the Socialist Party, serving for a while as a legal advisor in one of its district branches in Vienna; he was forced to resign, however, as soon as his past became known. Ultimately he was tried by an American court under the provisions of the Prohibition Law and given a two year sentence, eleven months of which he actually served at Stein.

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There are strong indications that Tavs and Slavik still maintain close control with each other by mail illegally taken into and out of the prison, and it has even been asserted that Tavs directs the National League from his cell at Stein in this manner.

After his release in early 1949, Slavik sought contact with Dr. Josef Dobretsberger's Democratic Union, but after a few meetings his services were rejected by representatives of that organization. It is also reported that at this time he came into contact with Erich Kernmayer and Wilhelm Hostal, co-members of the German intelligence services and reputed to be leaders of the secret "Spider" organization alleged to exist within the Association of Independents (VdI). (Kernmayer is the leader and spokesman of the so-called "Grunden Circle" of ex-Nazis.) In the fall of 1949 he was busy studying the Russian language at a school in Vienna IV, and by December he had gathered a circle of persons interested in the pro-eastern idea about him and decided to set up a public organization of his own.

After police approval of the program of the new organization was obtained, the first official meeting of the "Nationale Liga - Jung Schaffender Oesterreicher (National League - Association of Productive Austrians; the second part of the name has subsequently been abandoned) was held on 30 January 1950 at a restaurant in the VIIIth District of Vienna. At this meeting, attended by some 200 ex-Nazis, Ergocrats, Communist students, etc. one Walter Figl was elected Chairman of the new organization. No relation to the Chancellor, Figl is the son of the Socialist Party chief in Vienna XIV. He is a former member of the NSDAP, the NSKK and the SS; in 1942 he joined the Waffen SS Division "Adolf Hitler"; prior to the 1949 elections he was active in the Ergocratic Party. Figl retained this position only a very short time, resigning in February. He was succeeded by Josef Kupsch, the Deputy Chairman, who was formerly elected Chairman on 26 May. Kupsch was an applicant for admission to the NSDAP but was refused membership because he interrupted his activity in the SA during the period 1933-1938 when the Nazi Party was illegal in Austria. After the war Kupsch joined the Communist Party for a period but withdrew from it after quarrels with his superiors.

Now elections were again held at a general meeting on 1 October 1950 at which time Ferdinand Haidner of Baden, Lower Austria, succeeded Kupsch as Chairman. At the same time Dr. Herbert Wettinger of Graz was named Deputy Chairman and Walter Truger, Vienna IX, was named Executive Secretary. All three are currently in office. Haidner was non-commissioned officer in the artillery in the last war; prior to joining the National League he was active in the Association of Independents in the Soviet Zone. Truger is a former 1st Lieutenant in the Wehrmacht. No details of Wettinger's previous career are known. (A list of other former Nazis working with the NL is included as appendix A.)

The fact that Slavik himself has never served as an official of the League is due to his classification as an "implicated Nazi"; officials of public organizations must submit to the police sworn statements that they do not fall into this category (paragraph 17/2 of the Prohibition Law) before they can assume office. Nonetheless no attempt is made to conceal his complete domination of the organization.

In mid-March the League began publication of its press organ, the Oesterreichische Beobachter - a title obviously chosen because of its similarity to that of the Voelkische Beobachter, the main organ of the Nazi Party. The Beobachter appeared irregularly until mid-August when it apparently received a financial shot in the arm from an unknown source; since that time it has appeared regularly on the 1st and 16th of each month and with six pages instead of the previous four.

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Since its inception, the League has limited its almost entirely to paragraph #2 meetings - i.e. meetings at which admission is by invitation only; further, these meetings have for the most part been simply gatherings of between five and ten persons in a corner or back room of a cafe. This practice has 1) protected the League from disruption or hooking of its meetings by hostile elements and 2) rendered it extremely difficult for the police to maintain effective covert surveillance of the League. It has also led to the deduction that Slavik is, for the present at least, more interested in the development of a small, closely-knit cadre organization than in making a bid for mass support. It is also probably largely responsible for the frequent unconfirmed reports - perhaps more properly termed rumors - that Slavik has the function, assigned him by the Soviets, of assembling former ~~SS personnel~~ ~~SS personnel~~ ~~SS personnel~~ who can in the future be assimilated into "People's Police" units along East German lines.

b. olicies

In a confidential guide sheet distributed to its subordinate officials on 11 October, League leaders issued the following instructions:

"1. After the basic preparatory work of recent months, it is now time for a great intensification of cadre activity. The main task is to win capable and convinced new supporters. For this purpose the program pamphlet 'What Does the National League Want?' and the Oesterreichische Beobachter are to be used to a greater extent as auxiliary materials. All new members are to be divided into two groups - those who are prepared for active participation and those who are not. The latter are to be immediately integrated into the expansion program according to their experience and abilities (canvassing for new members, organization work, schooling, press work, etc.)

"2. The Federal Directorate has decided, after careful consideration, that all members taken in after 1 October 1950 shall first be admitted as candidates (kandidat) only. The period of candidacy will be one year, though in special cases it can be shortened on the recommendation of provincial group authorities. All new membership cards will bear the stamp 'candidate.'

"3. Experience indicates that it is necessary to attach greater value to discussion meetings for prospective members. Provincial groups (Landesgruppen) and District Groups (Bezirksgruppen) are advised to prepare as many such discussion meetings as possible and to send the most effective agitators to them. Detailed instructions for the preparation of such meetings will follow shortly.

"4. In general, paragraph #2 (i.e. closed) meetings should be held instead of public meetings for the time being. Public meetings should only be held when their success can be guaranteed in advance. They should never be held without the protection of an organized monitor group and the certainty that any attempt to break up or disturb the meeting will meet with successful resistance."

The program of increased activity outlined above is borne out in the 1 December issue of the Oesterreichische Beobachter which announces five special meetings in Vienna during the following two weeks in addition to weekly meetings in nine different districts of the city; weekly meetings in Innsbruck and Urfahr (Upper Austria), Graz (Styria), Klagenfurt (Carinthia), and Zell am See (Salzburg); the establishment of a new center in Innsbruck (Upper Austria); and a series of special meetings in Land Salzburg (Mittersill, Zell am See, Saalfelden, Imbrun and Land) between 9 and 11 December to be addressed by Slavik and Haidner.

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The pamphlet "What Does the National League Want" referred to above represents the most recent and complete statement of the League's program for the use of members and prospective members. Its main points can be summarized as follows:

1. It is the duty of all "nationally conscious" men and women, but above all of the young generation, to combat the present government parties which are preparing the way for the country's destruction.
2. The absolute neutrality of Austria is a necessary condition for the State Treaty, the withdrawal of the occupying troops and the economic recovery of the country.
3. Understanding with the east. "Good relations with our eastern neighbor states and the Soviet Union a necessity for the prosperous development of our country." One-sided pro-western orientation of government and major parties must be counteracted.
4. Re-orientation of foreign trade. Against Marshall Plan since it obliges the surrender of the country's political and economic independence. For broad commercial treaties with the eastern countries, which constitute the only extensive potential export market for Austria.
5. Measures for economic recovery. Economic planning, support of private initiative. Elimination of the unnecessary middlemen in trade. Improvement of the position of small and medium sized enterprises and agriculture. Fight against corruption.
6. A farm program calling for planned agricultural production, cost-covering prices, creation of state-subsidized farm machine cooperatives, improved schooling.
7. Socialism. Extensive state construction of dwellings, roads, power plants, etc. Socialization of the nationalized enterprises. Re-training or advanced training of the unemployed. Supra-party trade unions.
8. Repeal of denazification legislation and amendment of the War Crimes Law.
9. State support for art and scientific research.

The program pamphlet includes a statement of the League's "national creed" which reads as follows:

"We pledge ourselves to the German race (Volkstum), though supporting the separate statehood of Austria. We condemn national chauvinism and the attempts at world domination of individual great-powers as the seeds of war.

"We are convinced that the recovery and pacification of Europe is possible only through the creation of a strong and democratic Germany, and we follow with warm interest the national and social aspirations of that Germany.

"We demand protection and cultivation of our racial heritage, the deportation of all foreign profiteers and the immediate granting of citizenship to all ethnic Germans willing to work."

The cardinal point of the League program is, of course, its advocacy of rapprochement with eastern countries in general and the Soviet Union in particular. This is not based on any great admiration for the political system

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of the eastern European countries, but simply on the notion that the Soviet Union is bound successfully to overrun western Europe in the not too distant future and that the only hope of the ex-Nazis is to be on good terms with the victors. Slavik himself has frequently stated this cynically opportunistic credo in blunt terms. Ex-Nazis, for the most part, term him a traitor to his past; the newspapers label him a "national bolshevist" or a "commu-Nazi"; and someone has summed up his credo as "It's better to be a guard at a concentration camp than an inmate."

The Oesterreichische Beobachter is devoted primarily to the following themes:

1. Anti-American articles (denunciations of the bombing of cities in World War II, the Morgenthau Plan, capitalism, alleged war crimes committed by Americans, the Marshall Plan as a means to deprive European countries of their independence, allegations that US troops are about to withdraw from Europe, etc.)
2. Demands for the revocation of denazification and restitution laws, articles on the present plight of the former Nazis, etc.
3. Articles on Germany, the people's democracies and the Soviet Union.
4. Denunciations of the Association of Independents (VdU). The leaders of the VdU, particularly Kraus, Reimann, Hartleb, are described as having betrayed the cause of the ex-Nazis whom they originally purported to represent. This betrayal became complete with the downfall of Gollob. The 1 December issue speaks of Kraus's "pseudo-nationalism and anti-socialism."
5. Attacks on corruption and articles on the economic ills of the country.
6. Refutations of the charges that the National League is a front organization of the Communist Party and/or the Soviets. (At least one such article is given prominent place in every issue.)

c. Possible Ties with the Soviets

Since its inception there have been repeated rumors and reports that the League is supported by the Soviets. Slavik and Krupicka have been alleged to be the contact men for the League with certain unspecified Soviet officers; League leaders have been said to be able, through their intervention with the Soviets, to secure the release of ex-Nazis in prisons in the Soviet Zone; the League is rumored to receive financial aid from the Soviets; and Slavik is reported to have claimed in a private conversation that he has contact with a Russian "at least as important as Sviridov." At one of the earlier small meetings of ex-Nazi prospects for League membership, a League speaker is reported to have assured those present that the meeting was being held "under Russian protection." Soviet passive support or at least tolerance of the National League is indicated by the Soviet Element's failure to take any measures against the organization (headquarters are at Vienna IV, Frankenberggasse 14, in the Soviet Sector of the city) despite its vigorous wooing of the ex-Nazis.

When the banning of the Oesterreichische Beobachter was proposed by the western elements in the Press and Entertainment Committee of the Political Directorate of the Allied Council last week, the Soviets tied this case in with that of the independent Salzburger Nachrichten and Tiroler Nachrichten, insisting that they also be banned because of objectionable articles. However, no con-

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crete evidence of active Soviet support or even of direct contact between NE leaders and the Soviets has as yet been forthcoming. A former NE secretary, one of Slavik's first supporters though for non-political reasons, emphatically denied, when interrogated last September, that she had ever seen any indication that Slavik or any other member of the League was in contact with the Soviet Element; the credibility of this statement is strengthened by the fact that a large part of the copious other information supplied by her has proven to be true.

No further proof of direct contact and cooperation with the Communist Party of Austria exists than that the League sent a five-member delegation (Carl Messorbauer, Kurt Kacarovsky, Frieda Fikentscher and Arnostino Zach) to the Communist-front "Peace Congress" in Vienna last June and that the League supported, on a very limited scale, the Communist-sponsored general strike movement in September and October.

d. The Persy Case

In November one Ernst Georg Persy, an "implicated" former Nazi, was detained for a time by the Gendarmerie in Gmunden, Upper Austria, because his name was on a police Wanted List. It was subsequently learned that the Wanted List entry was outdated, Persy having already served 32 months in the penitentiary at Stein for his activities during the Nazi regime. Prior to his release by the Gmunden Gendarmerie, however, Persy - presently an influential member of the National League - was interrogated by CIC.

Persy told his interrogators that after having joined the National League in May of this year he received a letter from former prisoners still in Stein requesting him to inquire into the possibility of securing their quick release through the intervention of the National League and the Soviets, rumored to be feasible. When a discussion with Slavik failed to yield any concrete policy, Persy said, he decided to inquire into the matter personally. He visited the Soviet Kommandatura at Krems where he was advised to see one "Colonel Dolcakov" (phonetic) at the Hotel Imperial in Vienna. His attempts to talk to this Colonel were not successful, and he was prevented by the press of other business from continuing his efforts on behalf of the prisoners at Stein. Persy vigorously denied that he had actual contact with any member of the Soviet forces and claimed that his above-mentioned attempts were based solely on his personal desire to help former National Socialists.

Persy also stated that persistent rumors that Slavik was in the pay of Moscow (or the Americans) had impelled him to question Slavik as to the sources of the League's income. According to Persy, Slavik, "on his word of honor as a former SS man," denied all allegations of either Soviet, Communist Party, or US financial support. Funds for the League, he said Slavik told him, are obtained exclusively from Austrian citizens who are sympathetic toward the League or who possibly desire to "insure" themselves against the possible advent of people's democracy in Austria.

Persy's trip to Upper Austria was allegedly partly for the purpose of canvassing prospective new members for the League, and partly for the purpose of visiting Erich Karmayer (see above) for the purpose of obtaining a clear picture of the Gmunden Circle's opinion of the National League. He told his interrogators that Karmayer, with whom he actually spoke before his arrest, strongly stated his opinion that the League was nothing but a Soviet-controlled organization and Slavik a cheap demagogue, devoid of all honor; he admitted, nevertheless (said Persy), that some National League members were probably motivated by idealistic reasons instead of pure opportunism.

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Like the secretary from the NL headquarters questioned earlier (see above) Toray also denied any knowledge of connections between the National League and the Communist Party, although pointing out that the League "usually sends delegations" to Communist-sponsored peace movement meetings. League members are also urged to collect signatures to the Stockholm Peace Declaration.

Toray claimed that the election of new officers for the League on 1 October was largely due to the fact that Krupicka's former membership in the Communist Party had occasioned considerable dissention.

Toray's interrogators evaluated him as a self-important person, prevented by denazification legislation from becoming a political figure, who has found in the National League an opportunity to voice his antagonism toward the government and a feeling of solidarity with other persons in the same condition. Nevertheless, Toray himself had some doubts as to whether the League might not be an instrument of the Soviets, and had made repeated attempts to set his own mind at ease on that score.

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